PHOMENAGE

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FOLK LORE

VOL IV ISSUE VII

"The purpose of the American Square-Dance Group is to make available those rich stores of native dance, music, drama and general Americana which together comprise American folk culture; to conduct such activities without regard for race, creed, color or social position; to cooperate with those who hold similar views."

PROMENADE

EDITORIAL STAFF
Margot Mayo
Vita Rudikoff
Pat Diska
Barbara Rittenberg
Bill Miller
Gene Saletan
Byron Menendez
Phyllis Gold

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This is the first issue of the "post war" Promenade and as such has great significance for members of the ASDG.

The duration seemed so long when we first suspended Promenade. But now, with members of the group returning from various war-time activities, Promenade again springs to life.

Returning to civilian life is, at first, like a furlough, without the usual tension. Attending rehearsals or appearing at demonstrations seems like a temporary respite from the drill, the details, the fatigues of service in the armed forces.

But when a staff actually starts to work on Promenade once more, the future suddenly becomes the present. You are no longer planning for "When this mess is over" but for now, for next month, for next summer. And civilian life suddenly becomes a reality.

This year Thanksgiving acquires a new importance to all people, and the members of the ASDG find that there is much for which to be sincerely grateful. The "war-faring members" of the group are returning, individually, and too slowly, to the fold and there is an active and enthusiastic ASDG to greet them. We have lost two members, and nothing can ever replace those two boys for us who know the bitterness and angry hurt. But we know, too, a deep gratitude that the others have been spared. Forty-six members of our group saw active service, with one going in now as a substitute. We have indeed been lucky!

So begins the post-war period--and we carry on with a firm belief that our nation can be as united in peace as in war.

Margot Mayo, ex-Wac

During the last unheroic part of her army career, Margot was stationed at Ft. Moultrie, S.C. Besides her regular full time job in Public Relations, she was the editor of the camp newspaper, which involved writing, sketching, cutting stencils and collecting all those famous bucks that get passed around in the army. She taught, in her spare time, physical training and folk dancing to the Wacs, drew maps, painted posters, made decorations for various entertainments, wrote skits for the "orientation" lectures and called square dances for the wounded soldiers at an army hospital near the camp. That's about all she did besides washing and ironing uniforms and pulling K.P. with too frequent regularity.

The Polka

The correct dancing master who taught your grandmother to hop and skip daintily to the strains of "Jenny Lind's Favorite" would undoubtedly disown the lusty "Beer Barrel Polka" whose exponents may be found today in barns and dance halls throughout the United States. But both are cut of the same cloth, and the popularity of the polka today is proof of the hardihood and versatility of this imported dance step.

Folk-say explains the origin of the polka as the invention of a Bohemian peasant girl, who had just received some good news. The town musician, knowing a good thing when he saw it, watched her improvising the basic step and rushed home to compose a tune based on the rhythmic pattern of her feet.

In any event, the step caught on, and soon swept over the entire European continent. Inevitably, it crossed the Atlantic, traveling both in steerage and first class cabins.

The step has been used in the ballroom and traditional dances of dozens of national groups. Imprisoned at first in the airless studios of early dancing masters, it soon burst forth from its polite surroundings and became truly a dance of the people. The popularizing movement was speeded up by the fact that the polka was one of the first dances that could be learned from one's friends rather than from a trained teacher.

The Poles and Finns are, perhaps, the masters of this dance, but the people of almost every European country have given it a "flavor" of their own by incorporating it into their traditional folk dances. In America, too, the joy and zest of the polka has survived in the dancing of the cowboys in the West, of the farmers and fishermen of New England, of millhands and factory workers, townspeople and society folk all over the country.

Nowadays the polka has been reduced to a few very fundamental patterns. The Heel and Toe Polka, the Polka Mazurka, the Military Polka, the Polka Redowa, the Three Slide Polka or Esmeralda, and the contra dances and quadrilles which used the polka step as a novelty are found on few dance floors. But it is interesting to note that in some sections of this country the basic polka step is used in the promenade position for square dances.

The position for the polka as danced today in the United States is the regular ballroom position. The lady's step is exactly like the gentleman's, except that it begins on the opposite foot.

The gentleman begins by sliding his left foot out to his left on the count of one, closing with his right on the count of two, stepping again on his left foot on the count of three, and hopping on his left foot just after the count of four. Count four beats to the measure. Now the gentleman repeats, this time starting with his right foot. The gentleman must guide the lady just as he would in ballroom dancing, turning to his right (with two polka steps to the complete turn), or to his left --- a more difficult operation. As a relief to his dizzy partner, he may try a few steps in a straight line.

Texas Star

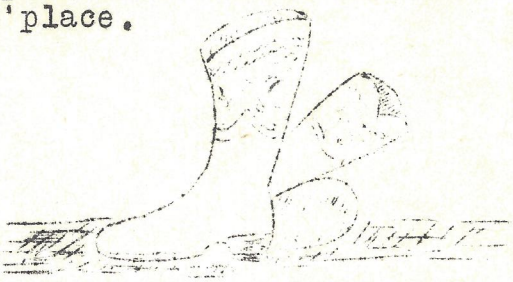
This dance was collected in a San Antonio USO by Pfc Cal Pryluck. The corporal who taught it came from west Texas, near El Paso.

formation: square set
music: Garry Owen

calls: 1) Introduction
2) Ladies to the center and back to the bar
3) Four gents in with a Texas Star
4) Back with the left
5) Pass your ladies by, pick up the next
6) Gents out, ladies in, form your Texas Star agin
7) Now turn back for a do-si-do
8) Promenade eight till you get straight

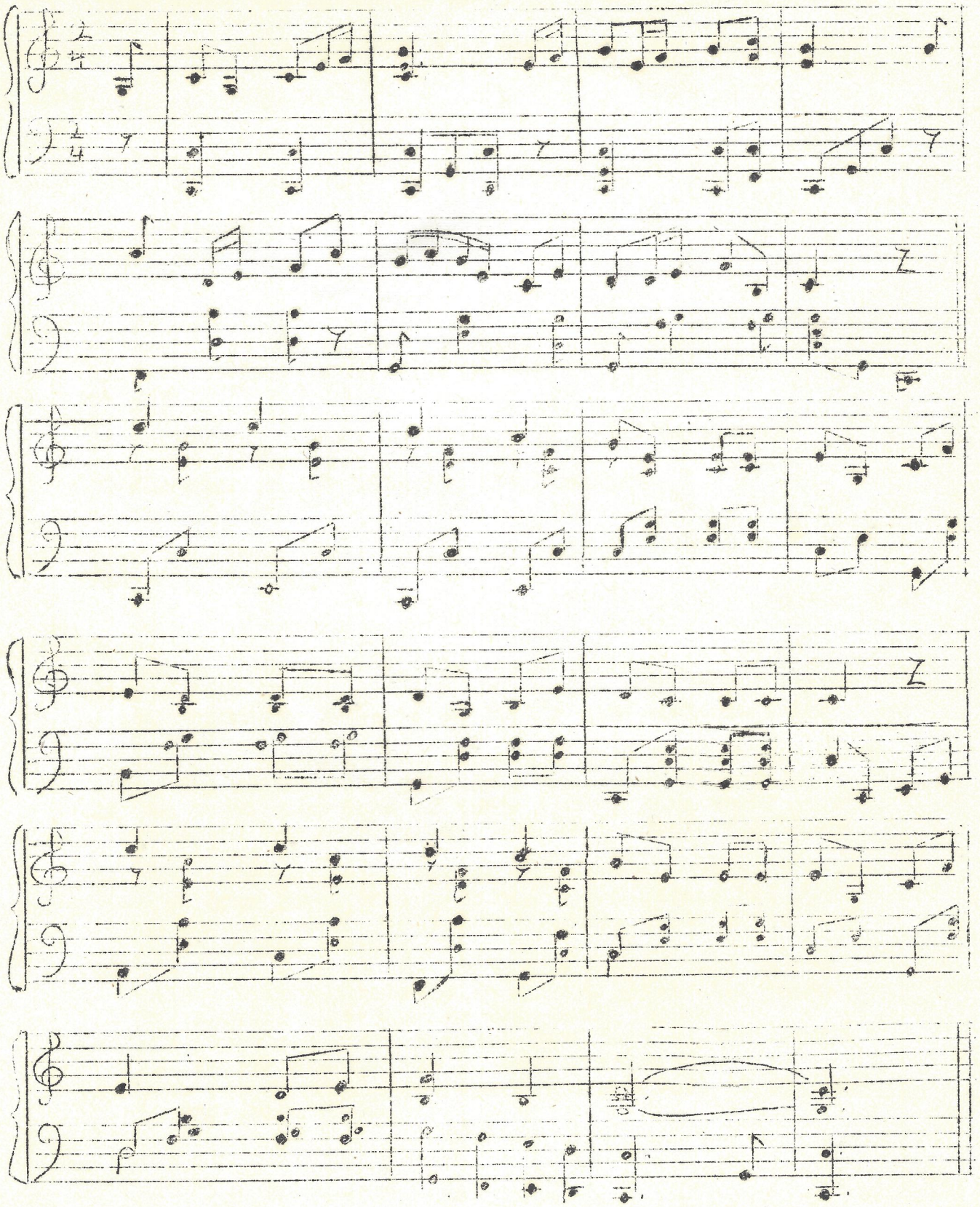
repeat from 2-8 three times until each lady has her gent
End with "honor your partners"

description:
1) Bow to your partner, then your corner
2) The four ladies move to the center, and each bows to the opposite lady. Then ladies move back to their places.
3) The four gents go in, raise and join their right hands in the center, and move in a clockwise direction.
4) The gents then turn to their right, join their left hands in the center, and move in a counterclockwise direction
5) The gents pass once around the circle, and on the second time round they pass their own ladies and pick up the next with their right hands, while their left hands remain joined.
6) The gents turn to the left, the ladies turn in and raise their right hands to form a Texas Star agin. The couples then pass to the gents places.
7) The first and third couples turn back to the second and fourth couples for a Western do-si-do.
8) Each couple promenades round the set till it is back in the gents' place.



PLAY IT YOURSELF

"Stuart's Tune"*



*This tune has no name, as far as we can find out. It was collected by Pvt Stuart Jamieson in the Adirondack Mountains, so we just call it "Stuart's Tune."

STORM

The storm comes black across the bay
Furious winds whip the trees
Slanting rain stabs against the roof
like a million dagger-points snapping against taut drums..

The storm is strong and black
It erases the lights of the city
And the island is isolated...alone...
Heavy darkness presses against the house,
And the barracks become a fortress,
Strong and secure against the storm....

I build a moat around myself
And draw into myself the luxury of memories..
Raucous, whiney voices cannot scrape against my mind
The small talk, the petty routine, the angry word
cannot reach me.....

For I am far away... 'way down in the Kentucky hills,
On the front porch agazing down across the valley
Where my people tilled and reaped ---
Where simple faith and honesty made frugal lives
Into a beauty we shall never know.

I am far away...in the Adirondacks...tamaracks are tall above me
The birds are my friends..the spring is icy-cold
And the silver-weeds are shining jewels 'neath the water...
I am strong.....I am a million things.. a hunter, a Viking, a pioneer
I am nine years old and very brave..at the top of the Big Pine
I sing to greet the dawn...

The city room is packed with people moving in ever-changing patterns
The "caller" mops his brow and puts his kerchief into his hip pocket
Tunes (from the Smoky Mountains, from the snow-fields of New England
from the yellow Western plains)
linger among the dancers..
And boys whistle as they stoop to tie their shoe-laces--
Girls shwoosh around in their full-skirted dance dresses...
There is laughter in that room...and youth and undimmed courage.
Where are those boys tonight? In a rain far colder than this?
In a storm that cannot be escaped!
I try to live it with them..
But the very contrast brings me back to reality.

The high-pitched voices beat down my memories
Like the rude wind outside --
And only the present exists

margot mayo

Hurrah for Judy

While we are giving thanks for our group good fortune, let's add a million for the good luck and expert medical care that preserved Judy Altstadt for us.

Judy gave us a big scare last winter by coming out on the losing end of an argument between a car and a truck. But she did come out, and with the aid of some delicate operations, bone grafting, an unfailing sense of humor and plenty of orneriness, Judy is just about as good as ever.

So, let's give thanks for our good luck, but let's stop putting it to the test.

Josef Marais' New Book

Josef Marais has written a book for children this time, using the folk material with which he is so thoroughly familiar. The African Veld is the background for "Koos, The Hottentot" and the book is illustrated by Henry Stahlhut.

Although the book has just been released and we've not had time to review it, we feel safe in suggesting it as an attractive Christmas gift for children, or adults, for that matter.

The book is published by Alfred A. Knopf and is listed at $2.50.

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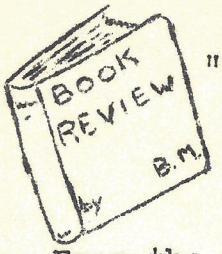


"The American Square Dance"
by Margot Mayo
Sentinel Books
New York: 1943 $.50

From the viewpoint of this novice square dancer, "The American Square Dance" by Margot Mayo, the founder of the ASDG, is just about tops. The directions are so clearly given and the book is so chock full of illustrations that it is just about impossible not to become a square dancer overnight.

An Introduction, which is both interesting and informative, contains chapters on Types of American Square Dancing, Music and Instruments, Hints to Callers, and How to Organize a Square Dance.

The calls used in square dancing are explained step-by-step in another section of the book, which is also profusely illustrated by large, easy-to-follow line cuts. Thirteen different dances are given, among them such old favorites as the Virginia Reel, Darling Nellie Gray, and Pop Goes the Weasel. Each dance is fully explained and illustrated in the same clear, concise manner.

There is appended a Bibliography, giving titles of books, authors, publishers, and prices. While, as the author points out, the list is by no means complete, it will serve as a good beginning for those who wish to delve into the folklore of the American square dance. The list of phonograph recordings of square dance music should also be helpful to those who might like to do a bit of practicing at home or perchance run a square dance evening of their own.

Last but not least there is music -- simple arrangements of ten dance tunes which may be used for the dances which were described in the beginning of the book.

If you are one who still becomes confused when the caller yells, "Grand Right and Left!" a reading of Miss Mayo's little book should most certainly help to straighten you out.

AIN'T THAT A CITY!

Folk-lorists, don't waste your time and energy on outmoded, old fashioned methods of collecting folk material! Gone are the days of arduous, backbreaking, heartbreaking trips through the rural sections of our country. The invention of the automobile enabled the ardent seeker of ballads and tunes to dispense with horseback travel, wading through creeks, and "footing it" up tall mountains. The advent of the recording machine has forever relegated the manuscript, paper and scratch pad to the oblivion of the bottom drawer. (Provided, of course you can wangle a fellowship or grant to get the machine in the first place!) And now a Twentieth Century, stream-lined, modern method of collecting new material has come into being, perhaps as an outgrowth of the war-time transportation problems, or possibly because the simple direct approach to any problem has always appealed to Americans.

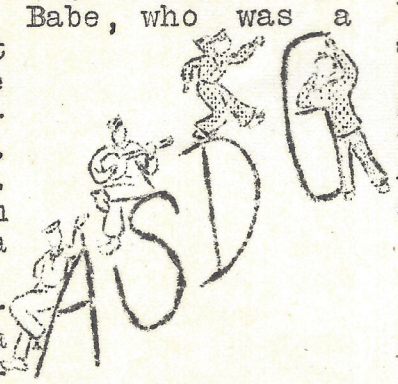
You love ancient English ballads, Negro work-songs, folk songs of the African Veldt, Haitian songs and dances, South American songs and dances? You enjoy hearing quaint old musical instruments such as dulcimers, Irish harps, zithers, not to mention magnificent guitar playing. Do you thrill to a fiddle tune, a Swedish Hambo, a Hopak, a Krakoviak?

COME TO NEW YORK

A short, noisy subway ride downtown will take you directly to the door of almost any fashionable Manhattan night club, where you can relax, listen to "authentic" folk songs, and sip a neat little snifter and spend only about half your monthly salary. How much simpler than the old days of traveling around the countryside, dragging through the dead white heat of the southern summer, freezing in the dead white iciness of a New England winter.

GROUP GOSSIP

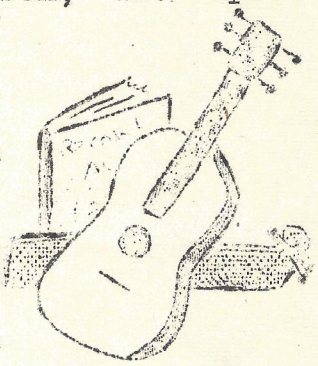
Byron, who participated in the Battle of the Bulge and spent six months in a German prison camp was the first to don civvies.... Soon after came Willie Fuchs, a captain in the Air Corps who was stationed overseas for two and a half years. Willie is married to Estelle Sillen and is teaching in a Brooklyn high school.... Babe, who was a signalman first class with the Navy in the Pacific is in St. Louis, studying. ... Gene Saletan turned up at a recent group meeting, resplendent in a first lieutenant's uniform with lots of fruit salad and a shiny new discharge patch. He was a bomber-navigator for a year. Another highly-beribboned Air Corps lieutenant, Eddie R., is also back....as is Manny Hollowitz, still another ASDG contribution to the Air Corps.... And last but not least, Pfc Margot Mayo sports a discharge button after two years of directing all publicity work at Fort Moultrie, S.C.



Sailors Leon Taub and Bob T., and T/4 Sol Schneyer have all dropped in at recent group meetings.... So has Stuart Jamieson, who expects to be a civilian soon. Other "almost outers" include Bob Gold and Danny and Bob Simon. Reversing the trend are Irving Friedman, who was inducted into the Army in October, and Alan Liss, recently commissioned an ensign, who will ship out soon. Alan, who has been studying at Columbia, has been able to drop in frequently to call a few dances....Pete Seeger, the traipsin' banjo picker, is back in this country after soldiering in the South Pacific.

Notes of Interest

The group started to get back into its old stride election eve, with a television broadcast for CBS, performed by a square set including five veterans. Regular group meetings and open houses are also in full swing again, with so many new members that the old timers are beginning to feel as though they belonged to another generation. The revitalized group is making its official bow to folk society Nov. 25, with a party at the studio. Guests will include Andrew Rowan Summers, who made the album, "Old World Ballads in America," one of the finest existing collections of Appalachian songs; Joseph Marais, whose songs of the South African Veldt are well known to radio and record audiences; John and Lucy Allison, who specialize in early American ballads and have several albums to their credit, and Tom Glazer, who has been doing a series of programs over stations WNYC and WJZ.



Other artists whose growing popularity reflects increasing popular interest in folk material include Tom Scott, who presented a program of American folk songs at Town Hall Nov. 11, and Richard Dyer Bennett, whose recitals of minstrelsy songs have taken him all over the country. Burl Ives, star of "Sing Out Sweet Land," has been bustin' out all over. Just returned from Hollywood where he had a featured role in the forthcoming movie, "Smoky," he will add a new note to concertizing with a midnight recital at Town Hall Dec. 1. He says he's too busy to give it at a more conventional hour.

Walter Hendl, composer of the music for "Dark of the Moon," is presenting a charming and informal series of sessions in Americana at Town Hall. Guest artists include Tom Scott, Susan Reed, Joan Field, Randolph Simonette, Josh White, Sammy Price, E. Condon.